



Cross Party Group on Tackling Islamophobia

Public inquiry into Islamophobia in Scotland

Muslim engagement
& development

mend

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Submission from Muslim Engagement and Development (MEND)

23rd August 2019

1.0. Introduction

- 1.1. This submission from Muslim Engagement and Development (MEND) seeks to examine Islamophobia in Scotland. In particular, it seeks to look at the current nature and extent of the phenomenon; the role of the media, the public sector, and politicians in its perpetuation; the impact of Islamophobia on children, young people, and families; and potential strategies for tackling it.
- 1.2. To document and respond to cases of Islamophobia, MEND has established the Islamophobia Response Unit (IRU). The IRU is a platform for victims of Islamophobic hate crime and discrimination to report and share their experiences and serves as a source of free advice, support, and referral services.
- 1.3. The IRU serves three main functions:
 - 1.3.1. Data collection and monitoring,
 - 1.3.2. The provision of free legal advice and police liaison,
 - 1.3.3. Provision of basic emotional support, and signposting to further professional sources of emotional support if required.
- 1.4. Our commentary within this submission extends only to our areas of expertise, namely upon issues surrounding Islamophobia, and is predicated upon data drawn from the IRU.
- 1.5. MEND is a community-funded organisation that seeks to encourage political, civic, and social engagement within British Muslim communities through empowering British Muslims to effectively interact with political and media institutions. Our approach to achieving this involves a combination of community engagement (through education, community events, local campaigns to encourage voting etc.) and advocacy work (involving victim support, submissions to parliamentary inquiries, media analysis, election resources, briefings etc.).
- 1.6. Our work has been recognised through the following accolades:
 - 1.6.1. The World Economic Forum commended our work as “best practice” in Human Rights “protection and promotion”.
 - 1.6.2. The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights rated us as the “best example for civil society organisations”.
 - 1.6.3. The EU Parliament Magazine stated that “The EU could learn a lot from MEND’s work on counter-radicalisation through engagement”.

- 1.7. MEND can assist parliamentarians and policymakers by:
 - 1.7.1. Providing briefings, information, analysis, and expertise on the issues facing British Muslim communities.
 - 1.7.2. Arranging opportunities for MPs to engage with their local Muslim communities.
 - 1.7.3. Conducting research within Muslim communities.
 - 1.7.4. Connecting MPs to local stakeholders.

2.0. What is the current nature and extent of Islamophobia in Scotland (including gendered Islamophobia and intersections with other prejudices)

- 2.1. When dealing with Islamophobia, there is often a conflation between racial and religious motivations. This often creates challenges in recording accurate data. Therefore, when approaching a picture of Islamophobic hate crime, it is necessary to analyse both religiously and racially motivated crimes. Moreover, it is also noteworthy that victims of all categories of hate crime face significant barriers to reporting, leaving such crimes notoriously underreported. As such, figures are usually significantly lower than the reality.
- 2.2. According to UK parliamentary briefings on hate crime statistics, there were 5,336 hate crimes recorded in Scotland in 2017-18. Of these, 642 (12%) of hate crimes being religiously motivated, while 3,249 (61%) were racially motivated.¹ Meanwhile, Police Scotland's hate crime database recorded a total of 6,733 such crimes in 2017-18, with 516 (8%) being religiously motivated and 4,483 (67%) being racially motivated.²
- 2.3. In 2017-18, almost half of recorded hate crimes in Scotland were committed in Glasgow and Edinburgh, despite these cities having just one fifth of the country's population.³
- 2.4. The Religiously Aggravated Offending in Scotland 2017-18 bulletin shows that 18% of religiously aggravated offending was in relation to hostile or derogatory conduct towards Islam.⁴
- 2.5. The data collected by the IRU reveals unambiguous trends of Islamophobia.
- 2.6. In its first year, April 2017-18, the IRU received 297 reports from victims of Islamophobic hate crime and discrimination (70% and 30% of reports, respectively).
- 2.7. Hate crime trends apparent from data sourced from the IRU include:
 - 2.7.1. The majority of incidents involve acts of verbal abuse. This includes street harassment, including abuse in public settings and slurs such as "P**i", "terrorist", "infidel", "scum" etc.
 - 2.7.2. The second largest form involves physical acts of aggression. Common forms include being spat on, slapped, shoved, being thrown to the ground, and women having their hijabs pulled off. This has a

¹ Parliament, 28th March 2019, Accessed: 23rd July 2019: <https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-8537>

² Police Scotland, 12th March 2019, Accessed: 23rd July 2019: <https://www.scotland.police.uk/assets/pdf/434027/526774/526793/19-0398-response?view=Standard>

³ Scottish Police Federation, 28th February 2019, Accessed: 23rd July 2019: <https://spf.org.uk/28th-february-2019/>

⁴ Scottish Government, 15th June 2018, Accessed: 23rd July 2019: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/religiously-aggravated-offending-scotland-2017-18/>

significant mental impact, with one victim stating that: “I feel so paranoid walking the streets, I feel like everyone is out to attack me. I’m super self-conscious in public now”.

- 2.7.3. IRU victim and witness testimonies show that over 80% of Islamophobic hate crime perpetrators are white males. Meanwhile, 75% of reports to the IRU come from Muslim women, which rises to 80% when solely considering physical attacks. These women are also almost exclusively ‘visibly Muslim’, wearing the hijab, niqab or burka at the time of the attack.
- 2.7.4. Incidents on public transport and cases of harassment by a neighbour are also common areas of abuse, resulting in reports of feeling “worried about the safety of my family [and] own home” and “anxiety in public spaces” following attacks.
- 2.7.5. It is common for there to be a surge in reports following major incidents. Indeed, following the Manchester Arena attack in 2017, the IRU witnessed a 388% increase in reports.
- 2.8. In the Scottish context, a 2019 survey by *Amina*, the Muslim women’s resource centre, highlighted similar trends to those unearthed by the IRU.⁵ The survey demonstrated that nearly two-thirds of Muslim women in Scotland have witnessed or experienced Islamophobia, with almost 75% of these women saying they were the victim. 65% of respondents said they didn’t report the incident, and 91% said there had been no intervention or support from bystanders.
- 2.9. In October 2018 MEND commissioned a UK-wide poll into Islamophobia undertaken by ComRes. 56% of people in Scotland agreed with the statement that ‘Islamophobia is a real problem in today’s society’, and 54% agreed with the statement ‘Prejudice against Islam makes difficult to be Muslim in this country’. Nearly half of respondees from Scotland thought that the religious discrimination faced by Muslims was greater than for other faiths.

3.0. The role of the media (print, broadcast, and social media), the public sector, and politicians.

- 3.1. Anti-Muslim hate speech is also evident in the way mainstream media represents Muslims, often in reference to issues of security, crime, violence and integration. Indeed, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) recently highlighted discriminatory reporting in both *The Daily Mail* and *The Sun*, claiming that they “are responsible for most of the offensive, discriminatory and provocative terminology”⁶ and noting that “hate speech in some traditional media continues to be a serious problem”.⁷
- 3.2. Social media also acts to disseminate anti-Muslim hate speech. Researchers at Demos catalogued 143,920 derogatory and anti-Islam tweets sent from the UK between March 2016 and March 2017, a daily average of almost 400 tweets.

⁵ “Majority of Muslim women in Scotland have been the victims of hate crime”, *The Scotsman*, March 2019. Accessed: 12th July 2019, <https://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/majority-of-muslim-women-in-scotland-have-been-the-victims-of-hate-crime-14893113>

⁶ “ECRI Report On The United Kingdom”, Council of Europe, October 4, 2016, https://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/country-bycountry/united_kingdom/gbr-cbc-v-2016-038-eng.pdf

⁷ *Ibid.*

- 3.3. Meanwhile, Facebook and Twitter accounts of leading far-right and anti-Muslim groups can attract several thousand followers. Amongst these groups are organisations which exist explicitly to counter the presence of Muslims in the UK, Europe, and the West. These organisations include groups such as the English Defence League, the Football Lads Alliance, PEGIDA UK, and Britain First.
- 3.4. Politicians and political parties send a message to wider society in terms of what amounts of acceptable conduct. It is, therefore, disconcerting that some political parties are failing to tackle Islamophobia or engage with Muslim communities following various instances of Islamophobia. In the Scottish context, examples of the Islamophobia within political parties include:
 - 3.4.1. Conservative council candidate George McIntyre said he was “sick to the back teeth” of “whinging” Muslims and suggested they should leave the country.⁸
 - 3.4.2. Conservative councillor Stephen Goldsack - formerly the BNP’s Scottish security advisor - was accused of having made incendiary comments towards Muslims, including “we can’t give access to these people.”⁹
 - 3.4.3. Roxana Iancu was a Conservative party election candidate who was suspended following anti-Muslim comments about the Nice attacks¹⁰
 - 3.4.4. Conservative councillor Ron McKail compared Muslim women in burqas to “patio umbrellas.”¹¹

4.0. The impact of Islamophobia on children, young people, and families.

- 4.1. In April 2018, Samena Dean distributed a survey to 100 Muslim children between the ages of 8 and 18 in Edinburgh, and found that of the children aged 11-18, 55% had been victim to verbal Islamophobic abuse and 50% had been the victim of physical Islamophobic abuse. Of those aged 8-11, 53% had been the victim of verbal Islamophobic abuse, and 26% had been the victim of physical Islamophobic abuse.¹²
- 4.2. The 2015/16 Childline report by the NSPCC noted that the service provided at least 981 counselling sessions for children suffering from racist/faith-related bullying. The report further noted that “young girls, particularly, felt victimised by others where they dressed in the hijab or wore a headscarf”.¹³
- 4.3. Significant increases in cases of racist and religious bullying have been observed following major socio-political incidents, with Childline reporting that in the fortnight following the attack at Manchester Arena in 2017, almost 300 counselling sessions were held in association with religiously-motivated

⁸ “Shut your whinging mouths! Scottish Tory candidate suspended over anti-Muslim rant”, Daily Record, March 2017. Accessed: 12th July 2019, <https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/scottish-news/shut-your-whinging-mouths-scottish-10000181>

⁹ “Scottish Tories expel mosque row councillor Stephen Goldsack over BNP links”, The National, May 2019. Accessed: 12th July 2019, <https://www.thenational.scot/news/16242950.scottish-tories-expel-mosque-row-councillor-stephen-goldsack-over-bnp-links/>

¹⁰ “VILE HATE BLOG Wannabe Tory politician binned after blaming Nice truck attack on French authorities”, Scottish Sun, March 2017. Accessed: 12th July 2019, <https://www.thescottishsun.co.uk/uncategorized/745900/wannabe-tory-politician-binned-after-blaming-nice-truck-attack-on-french-authorities-in-hate-filled-blog/>

¹¹ “cottish Tory councillor blasted after comparing Muslim women in burkas to PATIO UMBRELLAS”, Daily Record, August 2019. Accessed: 12th July 2019, <https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/politics/scottish-tory-councillor-blasted-after-13059308>

¹² “Muslim mum makes a stand against playground Islamophobia for daughter”, MEND, April 2018. Accessed: 23rd July 2018, <https://mend.org.uk/news/muslim-mum-makes-stand-playground-islamophobia-daughter/>

¹³ “Childline bullying report 2015/16: What children are telling us about bullying”, NSPCC, 2016. Accessed: 23rd July 2018, <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/research-reports/what-children-are-telling-us-about-bullying-childline-bullying-report-2015-16.pdf>

bullying. The charity also reported that girls who wear the hijab had frequently been victimised for their religious dress, with some expressing a desire to self-harm because of the cruel treatment they had received.¹⁴

- 4.4. A study conducted by academics from Newcastle University and the University of St Andrews found that while the majority of young Muslims in Scotland are actively engaged in politics and public life, everyday experiences of Islamophobia and racism made young Muslims anxious to engage in public life, with Islamophobia detrimentally impacting their confidence to play a more visible role in society.¹⁵

5.0. Tackling Islamophobia: a policy model

- 5.1. MEND's raison d'être is to empower British Muslims to be actively engaged in all areas of political, social, civic, and public life. Perhaps the greatest challenge in this aim is Islamophobia which acts as a barrier to exclude Muslims from enjoying their fundamental freedoms and opportunities.
- 5.2. To solve a society-wide problem, a combination of legislative change, Government and industry initiatives, Muslim community empowerment, and wider community engagement is required. As such, MEND humbly proposes the following initiatives and policy changes to tackle the causes, driving forces, and impacts of Islamophobia,
- 5.3. *Legislative Changes:*
 - 5.3.1. **Press regulation:** Considering the impact of media negativity on public perceptions, it is essential that a robust and independent system of media regulation is established. Such a system must include a position for group-complaints on the grounds of discrimination and the capacity to impose penalties that are appropriate in dissuading breaches of ethical reporting standards
 - 5.3.2. **Counter-terror legislation:** While the agreed independent review of PREVENT is an important development, it is imperative that the Government commits to independently reviewing all counter-terrorism legislation enacted since 2000 with a view to curbing the encroachment of counter-terrorism policies on civil liberties.
 - 5.3.3. **Incitement to religious hatred legislation:** Commit to an expansion of section 50A of the Criminal Law (Consolidation) (Scotland) Act 1995 to strengthen legal protection afforded to religion.
 - 5.3.4. **Primary legislation to deal with social media offences and online hate speech:** The Government should consider primary legislation to deal with social media offences and work with social media companies to protect free speech while developing an efficient strategy to tackle online hate speech.
- 5.4. *Government and Industry Initiatives:*

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ "Muslim Youth and Political Participation in Scotland", Newcastle University, 2017. Accessed: 11th July 2019, <https://research.ncl.ac.uk/media/sites/researchwebsites/youngmuslims/MuslimYouthScotland.pdf>

- 5.4.1. **Racial and religious equality:** In the context of current Brexit negotiations, attention needs to be given to supporting the principles of the EU Equal Treatment Directive to advance protection against discrimination on the grounds of religion to education, healthcare, housing, access to goods and services and social protection, within UK law post-Brexit.
- 5.4.2. **Employment:** The barriers to Muslim economic empowerment is an area that needs to be tackled by both governmental and industry initiatives designed to address religious, racial and gendered discrimination in the workplace through targeted interventions at all stages of recruitment, retention, and promotion, including through the use of name-blind applications.
- 5.4.3. **Schools.** Considering the impact of Islamophobic bullying as noted above, it is imperative that the Government prioritises PSHE and RE within the national curriculum and invests in educational resources for teaching about the dangers of anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, homophobia, and all forms of hatred. MEND considers such education to be primary importance and has developed schools materials and lessons plans to teach both primary and secondary schoolchildren about topics such positive contributions of Muslims, the history of Muslims in the UK, Islamophobia, discrimination and bullying.
- 5.4.4. **Media and broadcasting:** There needs to be emphasis on promoting positive and normalised images of Muslims within media and broadcasting. It is also essential that support is given to educative and industry initiatives designed to attract Muslim and BAME individuals into the spheres of journalism and broadcasting.
- 5.4.5. **Public exclusion:** It is imperative that public figures show greater maturity and responsibility when discussing integration debates and take care not to create unnecessary fear pandering to populist agendas. Meanwhile, especially considering the unclear status of Human Rights commitments within Brexit negotiations, we must ensure that the tenants of the European Convention on Human Rights and the Human Rights Act are preserved within UK law post-Brexit.
- 5.4.6. **Crime and policing:** Areas in need of government support include:
 - 5.4.6.1. Tackling the high number of Muslim prisoners through schemes to facilitate rehabilitation, cut re-offending and develop pathways for social inclusion.
 - 5.4.6.2. Launching research into the underlying reasons for the disproportionately high numbers of Muslim prisoners, including issues of socio-economic deprivation and structural issues within the judicial system.
 - 5.4.6.3. Ensuring robust data collection procedures, for example recording the gender of religiously motivated hate crime victims to facilitate in depth analysis and meaningful policy development
 - 5.4.6.4. Supporting educative and industry initiatives to attract BAME individuals into the police force.

5.5. ***Muslim Community Empowerment:***

5.5.1. The Government's current disengagement policy is a clear barrier to British Muslim's participation in social and political life. It is essential that the Government mends its broken relationship with Muslim communities. The Citizens Commission on Islam, Participation & Public Life suggested this relationship can be resolved through the Government committing to engaging with a wider spectrum of representative Muslim grassroots organisations¹⁶. This would include organisations such as MEND and MCB.

5.5.2. Muslims themselves have a responsibility to ensure that they are engaging with processes of democracy to overcome the challenges they face. As such, there are a number of ways in which British Muslim communities may be empowered to play their full role as civic actors. Strategies to achieve this include:

5.5.2.1. Supporting educative and industry initiatives designed to attract Muslims and BAME individuals into the spheres of politics, the civil service, media, and broadcasting.

5.5.2.2. Placing greater emphasis on educational programs aimed at empowering minority communities to be actively engaged within politics and media.

5.5.2.3. Encouraging grassroots and community led movements to overcome barriers to reporting hate crime and encourage maximum reporting of Islamophobic incidents to the police.

5.5.3. ***Wider Community Engagement:***

5.5.3.1. Islamophobia, like all forms of hatred, is an issue of social justice, and therefore, it is inherent upon every member of society to contribute towards ending it. As such, there are certain areas than MEND feels should be addressed:

5.5.3.1.1. Promoting a greater awareness of Islam.

5.5.3.1.2. Promoting greater inter-community engagement.

5.5.3.1.3. Prioritising PSHE and PSRE in the national curriculum to prepare young people for life in a diverse and pluralistic society.

5.5.3.1.4. Developing training programmes and resources for teachers focussed on tackling bullying based on race, religion, disability or sexuality.

5.5.3.1.5. Developing teaching materials to educate young people on the dangers of Islamophobia, racism, anti-Semitism, homophobia and other forms of hatred.

5.5.3.1.6. Supporting community and school-led programmes that encourage cultural exchange between pupils of different racial, religious, ethnic and other backgrounds.

¹⁶ "The Missing Muslims: Unlocking British Muslim Potential for the Benefit of All", Citizens Commission on Islam, Participation & Public Life, 2017. Accessed: 22nd August 2019, https://d3n8a8pro7vymx.cloudfront.net/newcitizens/pages/1261/attachments/original/1499106471/Missing_Muslims_Report_-_Electronic_copy.pdf?1499106471

5.5.3.1.7. Supporting academic freedoms and initiatives to decolonise education, whilst giving greater emphasis within the national curriculum to shared histories and the contributions of minority communities in building our society.